

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 2483 (Elhawary)

As Amended April 8, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to implement a standardized process to ensure any individual who successfully completes training in a CAL FIRE firefighting training camp while incarcerated receives official written certification before their release from prison and requires CAL FIRE to award hiring preferences to certain qualified formerly incarcerated individuals.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires CAL FIRE, on and after July 1, 2027, in partnership with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Conservation Camp program, to implement a standardized process to ensure that an eligible individual who successfully completes training in a CAL FIRE firefighting training camp while incarcerated receives official written certification before their release from prison.
- 2) Requires the official written certification to include certification commensurate with the individual's training towards meeting relevant minimum requirements for the Fire Fighter 1 (FF1) Classification or the Forestry Technician (FT) Classification.
- 3) Requires CAL FIRE, on and after January 1, 2028, if a qualified formerly incarcerated individual applies for an FF1 Classification position with CAL FIRE and has the required training and meets the minimum qualifications for the position, to award hiring preference to the qualified formerly incarcerated individual under Category Placement 2.
- 4) Requires CAL FIRE, on and after January 1, 2028, if a qualified formerly incarcerated individual applies for an FT Classification position with CAL FIRE, to count the duration of training and field work as an incarcerated hand crew member towards the minimum qualifications for the FT classification and award hiring preference to the qualified formerly incarcerated individual.
- 5) Authorizes CAL FIRE, if it establishes new entry level classifications or positions, including the successor classifications of those mentioned in this bill, and if the training matches the minimum qualifications for these new classifications or positions, to provide hiring preference analogous to that described in this bill to qualified formerly incarcerated individuals.

COMMENTS

CDCR, in cooperation with CAL FIRE and the Los Angeles County Fire Department, jointly operates 35 conservation camps, commonly referred to as fire camps, across 25 counties. All camps are minimum-security facilities, staffed with correctional staff, and typically located within a few miles of a small population center. Once volunteers pass the physical fitness test, they must complete CAL FIRE's FFT program, which consists of four days of classroom training and four days of field training, taught by CAL FIRE staff.

An inmate must volunteer for the fire camp program; no inmate is involuntarily assigned to work in a fire camp. Volunteers must have "minimum custody" status, or the lowest classification for inmates based on their sustained good behavior in prison, their conforming to rules within the prison and participation in rehabilitative programming. Some conviction offenses automatically make an inmate ineligible for conservation camp assignment, even if they have minimum custody status. Those convictions include sexual offenses, arson, and any history of escape with force or violence.

CAL FIRE generates a certificate of completion when an incarcerated individual completes the required hand crew training, and CDCR maintains custody of the document until the individual paroles. The certificate can be used by formerly incarcerated individuals to apply for FFI positions at CAL FIRE. Upon hire and placement into a CAL FIRE Unit on a hand crew, the FFI hand crew member is trained by the hiring Unit, and provided the minimum training necessary for response capabilities and fuels mitigation.

According to the Author

By requiring CAL FIRE and CDCR to issue formal certification and prioritizing the hiring of qualified former fire camp participants, AB 2483 invests in rehabilitation, reduces recidivism, strengthens our firefighting workforce, and promotes equity by ensuring that those most impacted by the justice system have the opportunity to serve their communities with dignity.

Arguments in Support

The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights writes AB 2483 recognizes the heroism, bravery, sacrifice, and commitment of incarcerated handcrews by creating gainful employment opportunities. Importantly, the bill would require CAL FIRE to ensure a pathway to employment for committed and qualified fire camp participants who wish to continue to pursue a career in firefighting after being released from prison.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) CAL FIRE estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$670,000 in year one followed by ongoing annual costs of \$568,000 to hire four office technicians and for specialized equipment to document, process, track, and create certifications for eligible incarcerated individuals.
- 2) CDCR anticipates potential ongoing annual General Fund costs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for necessary staffing.

VOTES

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0

YES: Bryan, Ellis, Alanis, Connolly, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

ASM PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND RETIREMENT: 7-0-0

YES: McKinnor, Lackey, Alanis, Boerner, Garcia, Nguyen, Michelle Rodriguez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: April 8, 2026

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FN: 0002603